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Thesis

THE INFLUENCE OF THE GREEK TECHNIQUE
OF TRAGEDY IN THE WORKS OF EUGENE O'NEILL

by

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

It is very startling, even to the elementary student of literature to hear the names and plays of the great Greek tragedians--Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Euripides--mentioned in connection with a contemporary tragedian, even if it be the well-known Eugene O'Neill.

The first reaction that one receives from most critics when one is so intrepid as to refer to these supposedly opposite exponents of tragedy is interesting. Some are scornful of a writer who has the temerity to deal with such extremes in the field of drama; and then there are the few who react with immediate, if surprised, interest. It is because of these few that this thesis is being written.

Did the Greek tragedians have any influence upon the modern tragedian, Eugene O'Neill? The word "influence" should be noted particularly here, for this paper is not an attempt at a comparison of the two types of tragedy (although of necessity some comparisons and contrasts will be made), but there will be an attempt made to prove that Eugene O'Neill was influenced to a certain extent at least by the Greek tragedians.

It is indeed with a sense of trepidation that this subject is approached, for certainly there are many obstacles to be overcome, if conviction and lucidity are to be attained.

In the first place, there is such a wide span in time between the two. Greek tragedy flourished in the fifth century B. C., over two thousand years ago.

If one considers the great changes made in his own generation, he can hardly grasp the immense differences existing between the world of the Greeks and the world of today. For one thing, consider the limited knowledge of the fifth century B. C. concerning the world and the universe. True, the Greek civilization was amazing in its culture and knowledge, but over how small a world that culture and knowledge extended!

It is unnecessary here to discuss all the differences existing between the two worlds, but merely those of pertinence to this topic. Perhaps the two most important came with the introduction of Christianity with all of its ramifications and the study of psychology with its various phases. These two factors are of great importance, as will be shown later, when one considers the drama of the two periods.

When considering the drama itself, the great difference in the theaters and stages of the two must be noted. The Greek theater was an open-air theater resembling our horseshoe stadiums of today, since the stage was lower than the audience and located at the open end of the horseshoe. In the most obvious place on the stage was the throne of the priest of Dionysus who "presided", in a sense, over the whole performance.¹

¹ Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill Jr., The Complete Greek Drama (New York: Random House Inc., 1938) Vol. I, p. XVI.

In front of the throne was a level circular area called the "orchestra", which means "dancing place." In the center of this area stood an altar which was often an important stage-property in the plays! To the right and left of the orchestra were the "paradoi", which were used by both spectators and actors for exits and entrances.

Beyond the circular orchestra lay the "skene" or scene building. In most plays this represented the facade of a house, palace or temple. It usually had three doors serving as exits or entrances. In front of the skene-building was a level platform, probably a step above the level of the orchestra. This was called the "proskenion" or "logeion" where much of the dramatic action of the play took place, although sometimes the actors moved down to the orchestra or up onto the roof of the skene building.²

Since it is obvious that this open-air theater with its exterior background of the skene put extreme limitations upon the playwrights, two devices were invented to alleviate this difficulty. One of these devices was the "eccyclema" which was a platform on wheels rolled out from the skene, and whenever an interior scene was needed, it was played upon this structure. The other device was the "machine". Often at the end of the play the dramatist had a god appear to straighten out the entanglements which may have arisen during the play; so, in order to give a little more realism to the scene, the

² Ibid., p. XVII.

god was lowered on to the stage (supposedly coming from heaven) by this machine which must have been similar to our cranes or derricks.³

Thus, when one considers our modern stages with their elaborate devices and effects achieved at a minimum of effort, he realizes again the great differences existing in the two theaters.

Besides these two great difficulties, those of the stage differences and those arising from the limited knowledge of the times, there is another difficulty, which at times becomes almost too disheartening to the reader who is trying to come to some understanding of the two types of tragedy; that is, the diversity of opinion concerning both the Greek drama and the Eugene O'Neill drama, but especially the work of the latter.

After two thousand years critics have come to a more or less unanimous decision concerning Greek tragedy but, even after this long period, there are many conflicting ideas and opinions. For instance, critics of Sophocles find difficulty in analyzing his plays; so we find critics disagreeing with other critics in their opinions.

This disagreement is probably due to his almost perfect craftsmanship as well as his depth of understanding. As one critic has said:

³ Ibid., p. XVII.

"They [the critics] all too often utter empty-sounding clichés on the 'calm and serenity' of Sophocles' attitude towards life, and hence they are prone to argue that he lived a serene and calm life himself After all Sophocles lived through the same years that brought disillusion to Euripides," etc.⁴

Apparently this critic objects strongly to other criticisms of Sophocles, and, of course, he has a perfect right to do so; but one wonders whether he is completely right and the others completely wrong.

These and other differences of opinion seem slight, however, when one reads the critics' opinions of O'Neill. This is due, of course, to the fact that O'Neill is a contemporary, and it is impossible to gain the proper perspective for a true evaluation of his work. This great divergency is so evident that it has been referred to as the "O'Neill myth".

"This myth is one result of the utter confusion of our standards of dramatic criticism, which speak of O'Neill one day as a 'sordid Realist', a 'grim primitive Naturalist' the next, a 'lying Moral Romanticist' a little later, and an 'immoral violent Expressionist' in the following chapter, and so on without apparently considering the possibility of his thoroughly understanding the basic meaning of his art."⁵

⁴ Ibid., p. XXXII.

⁵ Arthur Hobson Quinn, "Eugene O'Neill, Poet and Mystic", Scribner's Magazine, M. 80:368-72, October, 1926.

The only unanimous opinion concerning O'Neill seems to be that he is our greatest living tragedian, but even here, it is evident that critics vary sharply in their definitions of tragedy. Therefore, it would seem that anyone who has given true thought and study to O'Neill's work might be correct in his opinions, as no one critic's opinion has been wholly accepted.

In approaching this subject, it seems necessary that the nature of true tragedy be defined. For years, people relied upon Aristotle's definition of tragedy. In fact, at one time, it was the habit to take his Poetics as a kind of Bible for criticism, to be followed faithfully for ever and ever. However, as Gilbert Norwood points out, there are two things one must consider when taking Aristotle's definition: first, "the standpoint of his criticism;" second, "the value of his evidence."⁶ Obviously, he is defining Greek tragedy solely, and probably never had any idea that there should be such a universal adoption of his definition.

Aristotle's definition of tragedy is as follows:

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear affecting the proper⁷ purgation of these and similar emotions.

⁶ Gilbert Norwood, Greek Tragedy (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1938) p. 43.

⁷ Ibid., p. 43.

This definition would not satisfy us today, for new elements and new phraseologies have come into tragedy. For instance, today's dramatists strive for language fitting for the action and as beautifully expressed as possible, but they do not feel it is necessary that "the several kinds" be "found in separate parts of the play." Too, Aristotle has omitted one very important fact: that is, that tragedy also depicts the "collision of opposing principles as conveyed by the collision of personalities, which is an important element in modern tragedy."⁸

What then would be a generic definition of tragedy which would be sufficient for the purposes of this thesis? Starting with Aristotle's definition and including the definitions given since then, Whitney J. Oates has given the following characteristics which should form a basis for a definition: first, tragedy assumes the fundamental worth and dignity of man; second, it assumes that man possesses a power to make his own decisions up to a certain extent at least, and through this more or less free will he chooses his course of action in life; third, over and above man there exists under various names, some superhuman power; and lastly, there is evil and misery in the world.⁹

⁸ Ibid., p. 43.

⁹ Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill Jr., The Complete Greek Drama, I., p. XXVIII.

It is necessary to add, too, that although there is misery and evil in tragedy, there is no sense of the defeat of man. Man becomes a more worthy creature in his tragic conflicts, and therefore, the observer of a tragedy experiences a feeling of exultation. Man's tragic conflicts are usually of a universal type, such as man versus God; man versus Fate; man versus the gods; man versus the universal laws. Consider, for instance, an Antigone or an Anna Christie. As we analyze these victims of tragedy, we find ourselves asking this question: "If such things can be, what becomes of the law of eternal righteousness as given in the heart of man?"¹⁰ It becomes the function of tragedy to answer and solve these conflicts and questions.

Thus we, the spectators, are thrilled by the increasing endeavors of these tragic victims against such overwhelming odds, and although their dooms are evident, we attain a sort of ironic satisfaction as we see the saga of man and his struggles unfold.

It should also be stressed that tragedy is not composed of the sheerly horrible things in life, although horror is often an aspect of tragedy. Also, tragedy avoids the purely pathetic or pitiful, for then it would lose its nobility and become the object of scorn or pity.

¹⁰ Prosser H. Frye, Romance and Tragedy (Boston: Marshall Jones Company, 1922) p. 148.

What is tragedy? After viewing its basic characteristics it is evident that tragedy makes three main assertions: first, it asserts the dignity of man; second, it asserts the universal privilege of the freedom of the will; third, it asserts the existence in the universe of a superhuman force. It deals with universal conflicts; it arouses the feeling of exaltation, a sense of awareness of the nobility of man; and it should be styled in language appropriate for the tragic situation.

In the development of this paper the following procedure will be followed. First, there will be an analysis of Greek tragedy as a whole; then an analysis of Greek tragedy as seen through the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. The plays which will be considered are typical of the author and represent some specific type or phase of tragedy. The contributions and the characteristics of each author will also be given to acquaint the reader with each Greek tragedian.

The next chapter will deal with Eugene O'Neill's tragedies. Again only pertinent plays will be completely analyzed. His contributions to the drama and his characteristics as a tragedian will also be given.

The next chapter will serve as a connecting link, for we shall see in what particular ways Greek tragedy influenced Eugene O'Neill. To do this we will consider his own statements on the subject, his stage techniques and devices, his

characters, and his themes in the light of the Greek drama.

The last chapter will be devoted to a summary of this influence of Greek tragedy on Eugene O'Neill's tragedy and will attempt an evaluation of the importance of this evidence in his work as a whole.

This thesis topic, besides being of possible interest in a purely literary manner, may prove of interest in another way, for as Joseph W. Krutch suggested, in another connection and speaking of the play, Mourning Becomes Electra:

It is, in effect, the tragic poet's answer to the charge that both the sense of sin and the sense of greatness have disappeared from the human consciousness along with the religious sanctions which supported them. Perhaps the distance between Sophocles and O'Neill is some sort of measure of the extent to which the weakening of the sanctions has weakened the emotions which they strengthened if they did not create; but the distance is not as immeasurably great as it may have sometimes seemed when we are in the presence of those who take the police-court view of human nature.¹¹

Thus, it is possible that someone who was interested in the psychological, sociological, or religious changes since the time of the Greeks would find interesting material in this same topic.

However, the problem that our attention is focussed upon in this paper is a literary one, and we must not become involved in a discussion of all the interesting side issues that the subject unfolds.

¹¹ Joseph Wood Krutch, "Poet's Quest", Nation 141:415, October 9, 1935.

Once more, to repeat, our interest lies solely in this problem: the influence that Greek tragedy had upon the tragedy of Eugene O'Neill.

CHAPTER II

A GENERAL ANALYSIS OF GREEK TRAGEDY

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To consider the nature of Greek tragedy and to really understand this old form of drama it is necessary to go back to the story of its origin.

In the interval between the time of Homer and the age of the three great tragedians (probably about three hundred years) many advances were made by the Greeks in both philosophy and creative literature. It was in this period that there appeared a group of lyric poets: Sappho, Alcaeus, Simonicles, and others. Their poetry, besides being beautifully expressed shows how they had become aware of the inner nature of man.¹² Thus the creators of the Greek drama had a rich heritage from which to draw, both in legendary and literary tradition. It should be noted, too, that the audiences of these Greek playwrights were well aware of and even familiar with this background, for they spent long hours listening to these poems being read or recited.¹³ It is essential that the modern reader appreciate this point, for this is the only way in which the great popularity of the Greek plays can be explained.¹⁴

¹² Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill Jr., The Complete Greek Drama, p. XIII.

¹³ Ibid. p. XIV.

¹⁴ Loc. Cit.

In Athens of the fifth century B. C. dramas were presented solely on religious festivals, although in the rural sections of Greece plays were given at their own particular festive occasions. The two festivals in Athens were called the "Lenaea", or Festival of the Wine-press, which was held in January or February; and the "Greater" or "City Dionysia", held in March or April.¹⁵ It is the latter festival which has more interest for us, because it was at this occasion that the tragedies were presented.

This festival was held in celebration of the god Dionysus who symbolized the spirit of fertility, a fitting god for the season of the year. He became identified with the vine and vegetation, and ultimately it was through the worship of this god that tragedy, the satyr-play, and the dithyramb were developed. This latter early-type drama consisted of a hymn sung in honour of Dionysus by a chorus dressed as satyrs.

The development of tragedy as a specific branch of drama probably came about in the following manner, although critics vary considerably in their versions of this subject.

. . . first, in the early 'satyric' dithyramb the leader of the chorus was separated from his fellows and began during the course of the hymn to carry on quasi-dialogue or conversation with them. The song probably contained a large element of narrative with a theme bearing on some event connected directly with Dionysus. Next probably came the step of impersonation, when the chorus leader assumed the role of some character in the song. It seems reasonable to

¹⁵ Ibid. p. XVIII.

suppose that this rudimentary dramatic form now became distinct from the dithyramb proper, which carried on an independent existence. In the dramatic form, however, after the step of impersonation had been taken, new themes were probably introduced which were not necessarily connected with Dionysus.¹⁷

After this gradual development, came the addition of the second actor, probably created to respond to the leader of the chorus thus helping the narrative along. Aristotle in his Poetics credits Aeschylus with this addition; later, Sophocles added the third actor.¹⁸

Two important characteristics came from this development of Greek tragedy which largely determined its nature. First, as tragedy originally centered around the chorus, it can be seen how much importance it had in the later tragedies and secondly, it should be noted that Greek tragedy had its origin in religion.

Right down through the fifth century, tragedy was essentially religious in its nature and idea. The altar to the gods remained upon the stage and there were temples erected directly behind the skene-building; so it is evident that the religious atmosphere was rigidly maintained.

Thus the story of the origin of Greek tragedy explains why it was sober and solemn in spirit; poetic in nature; and interested primarily in universal conflicts and relationships.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. XXII.

¹⁸ Ibid. pp. XXII-XXIII.

Our modern tragedians are also interested in universal conflicts and relationships, but they are interested in obtaining new and original stories and plots to propound them. The Greek tragedians did not stress originality of plot, however, but went back to previous sources.

With only four exceptions Greek tragedy found its sources in the mythological legends of the old epic poets. As one reads the Greek tragedies, he feels he is continuing a study of the characters of The Iliad and The Odyssey of Homer. The Trojan Women by Euripides relates the experiences of many of the conquered women of Troy in just such a manner. This return to the epics was probably done for two reasons: first, because of the religious conservatism of the Greeks, and secondly, because of their "idealising instinct."¹⁹

Aristotle defends the use of these themes because of their credibility and their possible semi-historical foundation. Certainly the audiences of the Greek tragedians accepted the stories wholeheartedly.²⁰

As a result of this source material used, the authors were more or less limited in their subject matter, and there were a number of plays on the same subject by different authors. There are for example, three different plays dealing

¹⁹ Arthur E. Haigh, The Tragic Drama of the Greeks (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1890) p. 328.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 328.

with the return of Orestes. In each play the subject was treated a bit differently, but as long as the author confined himself to the main outlines of the old story, minor changes were considered acceptable by the audiences.²¹

Another significant result of this practically universal adoption of the epic material was that the characters and situations were almost entirely confined to royal and princely families.²² Hence, Aristotle's idea that all tragedy should be confined to people of high rank. Modern tragedians do not feel that this necessarily follows.

It was due, too, to this source material that the graceful and majestic pictures of the heroic world were obtained. In the Agamemnon of Aeschylus there are examples of the spectacular scenes which developed from these ideas of the heroic world. The great procession held at Agamemnon's return from Troy was a typical spectacular scene.

And not only was the subject matter obtained from the old poets but the language that so distinguishes these plays. A wealth of metrical forms as well as many passages of unsurpassed eloquence came from these early poets, for they had learned to reflect every shade of feeling which was necessary for the character or situation being described.²³

²¹ Ibid. p. 329

²² Loc. Cit.

²³ Ibid., p. 321.

It is not necessary here to go into details about the great variety and abundance of poetic verse forms used in these early plays. Usually trochaic tetrameter or anapests were used in recitative passages and iambic trimeter, in the dialogue. One of the remarkable traits of these plays was the smooth transference from speaking to musical passages. No breaks in rhythm can be noted.²⁴

Later, the individual language characteristics of these three dramatists will be discussed, but let it be understood that generally the Greek plays were couched in language of pomp, elevation, grace, and eloquence, and are noted for their musical beauty.

The third important characteristic of the Greek plays was the presence of the chorus. As has been stated the Greek plays developed from the simple ceremonies used by groups of people in their worship of the gods. From the ceremony of these worshippers developed the chorus of the Greek plays.

In the plays of Aeschylus the chorus was still very important. In fact, in The Suppliants, the chorus is in a sense the leading character. In all his plays it was a flexible unit varying in nature according to the needs of the play, but by the time of Sophocles its position had become stereotyped and fixed. It had no longer a definite part of the action but the position of a sympathetic witness or

²⁴ Ibid., p. 370.

listener, and by the time of Euripides it was merely a musical interlude. Of course this created less individuality in these latter dramatists' choruses than in the Aeschylean Choruses.²⁵

When the chorus was sharing in the dialogue, it represented the ordinary mass of human beings in contrast with the more heroic leading characters. In this role, it had the weaknesses and strong points of the ordinary citizen: such as respect for authority, loyalty, fear of revenge and punishment, and subject to vacillations.

If the chorus was left alone on the stage, even in the later plays, it soared to a much higher level. It judged things by the eternal laws of justice and religion.²⁶

The lyric element in these plays, mentioned before, centered around the chorus. Beautiful lyrics may be found in the odes which separated or introduced the dramatic scenes that the choruses have to themselves, and when the chorus took part in an episode it often gave a lyrical tone to the passage or helped to emphasize some particular situation.²⁷ These odes would prove interesting to a student working solely in the field of Greek tragedy, for they have an unusual scope of subject matter, extending from the "national odes" (such as

²⁵ Ibid. pp. 152-156.

²⁶ Loc. Cit.

²⁷ Richard G. Moulton, The Ancient Classical Drama (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1890) p. 69.

appear in The Persians) to the "nature odes" (as in Oedipus in Colonnus).²⁸

And finally there was often choral work in the episodes themselves such as the "lyric solo" done by one actor or the "lyric concerto" done by an actor or actors and chorus in alternation. The former would be similar to our spoken soliloquies today, and the latter, to our choral reading or operatic work.²⁹

Thus we may visualize the chorus, group of approximately fifteen members, varying from great prominence in the time of Aeschylus to the minor position of a musical interlude in the time of Euripides, gaining its importance from the fact that it furnished the lyrical element to the plays and gave the audience an idea of how it was to react to the whole situation.

The actors in those early plays did not have the chance to be "individual" that our actors do today. There was a general similarity in all the plays in the way of representing character. All the heroes and heroines represented types of humanity. Even so, they were not vaguely drawn since the dramatists made them act not only as kings or nobles would have acted in real life, but as everyday persons would have acted under similar circumstances. Although Aristotle would have his characters neither completely good or completely bad,

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 76-80.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 81.

but a mixture of vices and virtues, this did not necessarily happen in Greek tragedy. For example, in the Agamemnon, the leading character, Clytemnestra, is a murderess. We admire them for their heroic fortitude under adversity more than for anything else.³⁰

On the stage, the actors wore type costumes. They wore the "cothurnus" or high-soled boot to gain stature, and long flowing robes and masks to gain impressiveness. Because the audience was so far removed from the stage, masks were essential. They indicated the facial expression of the person which was dominant. Of course this limited the actor's ability in transmitting his mood or characterization, so a great deal of pantomime was used.

Since the audience was so far away from the stage, diction was very important, and it is believed that the dramatic enunciation of the leading characters was excellent. As many of the leading roles contained singing parts, actors had to have good voices.

Certain actors were always well-known by the audiences, for they were more like our present-day orators, as they maintained their own personalities to a large extent rather than assuming completely the role which they were playing.

Similar to the playing of many of the great Shakespearian roles, many parts were played in a traditional manner

³⁰ Arthur E. Haigh, The Tragic Drama of the Greeks, pp. 333-335.

with each successive actor using certain make-up, costumes, and gestures. Sometimes the same actor played two or more parts in the same play indicating the blood relationship between two characters.³¹ In the Orestes, for example, the same actor might play both Orestes and Electra.

The last general characteristic of Greek tragedy which should be mentioned in this chapter is the similarity of motives in all the plays.

Behind all the plays, "Destiny" or "Fate" was the main motive inspiring the action. Destiny may appear as an abstract Power or Force or it may become a Providence (as in Ion).³² Richard Moulton says in summarizing the influence of "Destiny":

We conceive of the Athenians as a people of joy, living in a brilliant atmosphere, entering with fervour into religious orgies, weaving an imaginary world out of nature details etherealized. But all this must be viewed against a somber background of fatalism, reaching beyond the gods, yet which might suddenly emerge in the most trifling detail of experience, wavering between kind Providence and reckless Fortune, the eternal sanction of right yet wearing at times the form of human passions, revealing itself only in delusive mystery, capable of being set in motion by man, yet once aroused needing only opposition to draw out its malignant irresistibility.³³

A second dramatic motive in Greek tragedy was the interest in horror.³⁴ Terrors of the supernatural world often

³¹ Gustav Freytag, Technique of the Drama (New York: Scott Foresman and Company, 1894) pp. 140-150.

³² Richard G. Moulton, The Ancient Classical Drama p.93.

³³ Ibid., pp. 108-9.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 100-110.

appeared on the stage. The Furies represented the presence of crime; ghosts appeared, as in The Persians, and Death, an actual character, as in Alcestis came onto the stage. Terrible also were the unnatural horrors of the real world: a banquet of human flesh was the foundation of the House of Atreus legend; incest and matricide appeared in the Oedipus plays; madness and delirium raged in the characters Cassandra and Orestes; human sacrifice took place in the case of Iphigenia, and in no less than four of Euripides' plays, a person gave his life for another.³⁵

A minor dramatic motive was the interest in "splendor" or "spectacle" scenes.³⁶ In Euripides, the spectacular element centered around Apollo who deified brightness in all its forms. In the Alcestis, Admetus' identification of religion with brightness and hospitality provided a theme for the play.

An interest in "human sentiment" and "human bonds" provided another dramatic motive.³⁷ Family ties and subsequent ruptures were the bases of several tragedies, as for example, the Antigone; friendship ideals are often represented, as might be found between Orestes and Pylades; the relationships between the suppliant and his superior were dismissed as in The Suppliants.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 100-110.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 110-117.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 117-120.

Other minor motives were those dealing with the idealization of life; politics and democracy; social topics such as love, marriage, relationships between men and women, and women and women.³⁸

In summary, the distinguishing traits of the Greek tragedies were developments from its origin and source and were evidenced by its chorus, actors, general motives, and themes.

Surely on the surface this type of tragedy may seem far from modern tragedy, but what does further analysis reveal?

As a study is being made of the Greek tragedians, some light may be thrown upon this question.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 120-123.

CHAPTER III

AN ANALYSIS OF THE "THREE GREEK TRAGEDIANS"--

AESCHYLUS, SOPHOCLES, AND EURIPIDES

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The first dramatist to be considered is Aeschylus, one of the greatest poetic geniuses that the world has ever had.³⁹ Because he was the first Greek tragedian of importance, his contributions to the development of drama are varied and important.

He was the first dramatist to conceive of the possibility of depicting a story in dramatic-form and to carry out his idea he introduced the second actor.⁴⁰ Thus he could have his antagonists face to face, causing a struggle or conflict, which gave to drama its most essential quality.

It was Aeschylus who first associated the name of tragedy with ideas of grandeur, solemnity, and religion, as a study.⁴¹ To give his plays these characteristics, he used poetry which is noted for its massive strength, eloquence, fitting figures of speech, and grandeur. Every part of his play, from the plots to the language, is on this magnificent scale.

He made important contributions to the stage technique, also. By raising the actor's height with thick wooden boots

³⁹ Arthur E. Haigh, The Tragic Drama of the Greeks, p.60.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 61.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 65-67.

and by increasing their bulk by padding, he gave them a super-human appearance. He introduced the gloomy and awe-inspiring masks which continued through the development of Greek tragedy. In some of his later plays he introduced spectacular effects, such as thunder and lightning.⁴²

Like most early poets in choosing subjects for his plays, he showed a preference for everything which was strange or mysterious. He led up gradually to the catastrophe and indicated how an atmosphere of gloom or doom was engulfing the victim slowly but surely. His delineation of the weird and the supernatural were excellent as may be seen by his portrayal of the Furies in the Orestes trilogy.

He was primarily interested in religion and theology and used human affairs to propose his problems. His odes reflected many of his ideas. Always he seemed to be trying to reconcile the popular religion with the more advanced conceptions of the leaders of his time. His conception of Zeus was very advanced for his time, for his idea of Zeus was similar to our idea of God today. To him, usually, Zeus was supreme and just. However, the influence of the popular religion is evident in his conception of the Furies, whose mission was to pursue criminals unrelentlessly. He believed that the Furies would not stop at punishing just the guilty but would pursue even the innocent relatives or descendants of the guilty. Evidence for this fact is to be found in The Agamemnon when

⁴² Ibid., pp. 67-68.

Clytemnestra tells the chorus she is not guilty, but her "avenging spirit" caused her to kill her husband. In Oedipus neither Eteocles or Polyneices is guiltless although each seems to be merely a victim of fate. Aeschylus says in his defense of eternal justice that Eteocles was guilty of fraternal hatred and Polyneices was guilty of warring against his own native country.

He made no predictions of a heaven but did mention a Hades; so we may assume that he was not clearly decided upon the subject of the future world.⁴³

To gain a better understanding of Aeschylus, a consideration of a few of his plays might be beneficial. His first play, The Suppliants, is usually considered the first extant drama in Western Europe.⁴⁴ The play is based upon the story of two brothers, Aegyptus and Danaus, and their heirs. Trouble between the two arose when the fifty daughters of Danaus rejected the proposals of the fifty sons of Aegyptus. The maidens and their father fled to Argos to seek protection from King Pelagus of that island. King Alagus assumed protection over them and refused to turn them over to the sons of Aegyptus. War is about to develop as the play ends. Since there is no definite solution to the play, it is assumed that it was the first part of trilogy.⁴⁵

43 Ibid., pp. 76-94.

44 Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill Jr., The Complete Greek Drama, I., p. 6.

45 Ibid., p. 5.

The Chorus is really the protagonist in this play and Aeschylus is putting forth two main ideas: the gods are friends and protectors of suppliants, and Zeus is an unanthropomorphic deity.

Prometheus Bound is an interesting play because of its "different" quality. Aeschylus took the story of the great Titan who, feeling sorry for the helplessness of man, stole the gift of fire from heaven to give it to men. Zeus had planned to destroy the race of men, and so in anger at Prometheus' action, he caused the Titan to be manacled to a huge rock and left to die.

Aeschylus had a difficult dramatic problem here, for he had to build his play about a character who cannot move. He solved his problem by introducing several characters, all superhuman, who come to talk to his main character. Aeschylus was attempting to discover the nature of the power behind the universe. It is difficult to reconcile the Zeus of this play with the Zeus of The Suppliants who was kind and just towards men. There may be symbolism in the character of Zeus, upholder of brute force, and Prometheus, upholder of wisdom.⁴⁶

Aeschylus' greatest work is The Trilogy Oresteia composed in three parts: The Agamemnon; The Choephoroi; and The Eumenides. The plot is significant, because it was used by the other two great tragedians, and much later by Eugene O'Neill.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 126.

Aeschylus is studying the effect of a curse upon a "House", and, this trilogy concerns the "House of Atreus". Atreus and Thyestes became enemies and Thyestes wronged Atreus' wife. For revenge, Atreus slew Thyestes' children and served them to him at a horrible banquet of human flesh. The curse started then and descended upon the sons of Atreus, Agamemnon and Menelaus. No trouble arose for them until Helen, wife of Menelaus, ran away to Troy with Paris. Then Agamemnon at Menelaus' request planned to sail to Troy to regain Helen. However, the gods would not give them good winds for sailing, and it was decreed by the oracles that they should not have good sailing weather until Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter, Iphigenia. After ten years of fighting Troy fell, and Agamemnon returned home. At this point, the action of The Agamemnon begins. Clytemnestra is awaiting her husband's return. Since his absence, she has taken a lover, Aegisthus, and with him is plotting to kill Agamemnon in revenge for Iphigenia's death, and of course, to obtain all the power. This play continues, dealing with Agamemnon's return with Cassandra as captive, Cassandra's predictions, and finally Agamemnon's murder.

The Choephoroi relates the story of the slaying of Clytemnestra and her lover by Electra and Orestes in revenge for their father's death.

The Eumenides shows how Orestes breaks down under the relentless tormenting of the Furies, but is finally absolved of his guilt.

The significant characteristics of his trilogy are the characterizations of Clytemnestra and Cassandra (which are handled with almost a modern psychological approach), the use of the spectacular (appearing in the description of Agamemnon's procession return from Troy), and Aeschylus' conception of a divinity which is at once merciful and just.⁴⁷ The trilogy, as a whole, is focussing its attention upon the problem of evil, and at first it seems as if Aeschylus believed that Zeus' law is the law of an "eye for an eye". His Furies, the avengeful instruments of Fate, however, were finally won over by Athena and became Goddesses of Mercy, so justice and mercy are triumphant.⁴⁸

Thus, Aeschylus should be remembered for the following points: his introduction of the second actor; his powerful rhetorical poetry; his attempt to reconcile the differing religious views of the day; and his conception of Zeus as an unanthropomorphic deity of infinite wisdom and mercy.

Sophocles, the greatest of the three tragedians seems to possess the best qualities of Aeschylus, his predecessor, and of Euripides, his follower.⁴⁹ He is so very nearly perfect in his craftsmanship that he is difficult to analyze.

47 Ibid., pp. 163-164.

48 Ibid., p. 164.

49 Ibid., p. XXXIII.

One of his major contributions to the drama was the introduction of the third actor. This resulted in the diminished importance of the Chorus and led to an increased emphasis upon plot and characterization. He also abandoned the trilogic system of composition, treating each play as a separate piece of work. Wishing to humanize tragedy and to bring it down to earth, he replaced the awe-inspiring language of Aeschylus with a language of grace, beauty, and simplicity. His characters still remained on a high plane, but came nearer to earth than those of Aeschylus.⁵⁰

He introduced painted scenery, raised the number of the chorus from twelve to fifteen, and was the first to use Phrygian music in his plays.⁵¹

In his plot structure he kept faithfully to the mythological tradition, but instead of seeking for the unusual or mysterious, as Aeschylus was apt to do, he dealt with the human, trying to portray the passions and inner traits of man. He is noted for his singleness of purpose and artistic unity of structure throughout his plays; as, for example, in The Electra where our attention is centered upon her and her alone throughout the play.⁵²

⁵⁰ Arthur E. Haigh, The Tragic Drama of the Greeks, pp. 138-142.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 142.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 153-158.

In character portrayal the supremacy of Sophocles is unrivalled. His keen analysis of character, his unlimited knowledge of human nature is evident through his many and varied characters.⁵³ The character Creon is treated differently in three of Sophocles' plays illustrating his ability to portray all aspects of human nature. For the most part, he dwelt on the brighter side of man's nature, for even his characters who have vices have vices of a high-minded person; that is, anger, revenge, ambition, rather than the meaner qualities of cowardice and craft. Thus his characters retain a certain nobility even in their evil practices. He gave more consideration to characters from humble life than Aeschylus and Euripides, using watchmen and guards freely. However, even the comic watchman in the Antigone was not allowed to destroy the general high tragic tone of his play.⁵⁴

Although the plays of Sophocles have spiritual significance, his first consideration was for the dramatic interest. He depicted the passions and sufferings of his characters, so that the spectator would realize how these feelings were related to the eternal laws of justice and divine government. His decrees of destiny and his ethical sense always remained in the background rather than in the foreground as in the plays of Aeschylus. He agreed with Aeschylus that the Divine Being was

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 153-158.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 159-161.

just and would mete our punishment where it was deserved, for in Oedipus Tyrannus he says:

If a man walks proudly in word or deed, with no fear of Justice, and follows unrighteous gains, how shall he escape the arrows of the gods?

He was not quite as optimistic as Aeschylus about man's destiny, however, for he had to admit that while crime may be punished, innocence is not always protected. Antigone is put to death because she obeys the laws of God rather than the laws of man; Oedipus meets with misfortune through no fault of his own. Sophocles did not try to reconcile this evidence of undeserved evil with his belief that there is justice in eternal laws, but refers to it as many moderns do, as one of the "mysteries of God".⁵⁵

Perhaps the most outstanding characteristic of his style is the use of tragic irony. Very often in his plays some character is unconsciously approaching a certain doom of which the audience, although not the character, is well aware. The irony of the character's speeches lends tragedy to the situation. Of course, the most famous example of this trait is to be found in Oedipus Rex. In the opening scene of the play Oedipus is greeted as the "wisest of men in dealing with life's chances and with the visitations of heaven." Here he is a prosperous happy king, but before the end of the play he is to meet complete tragedy. After the priests have said that the

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 169-174.

murderer of Laius, the father of Oedipus, must be punished if the current plague on the city is to be stopped. Oedipus is not aware that he himself is the murderer and makes one of the most ironical speeches of the play:

As for the man who did the deed of guilt,
whether alone he lurks or in league with others,
I pray that he may waste his life away in
suffering perishing vilely for his vile actions.
And if he should become a dweller in my house, I
knowing it, may every curse I utter fall on my
own head.⁵⁶

Turning to a more specific study of Sophocles' plays may prove helpful at this time. His masterpiece, Oedipus Rex, was based upon the same legend that Aeschylus used in Seven Against Thebes. The plot is well-known to every student of literature; it concerns the tragic discovery by Oedipus that he has unwittingly slain his own father, married his mother and had children by her; the subsequent suicide by Jocasta, his mother-wife and self-inflicted blindness of Oedipus. This tragedy is often called a tragedy of fate, for the characters are caught in a web of circumstances from which they are unable to escape.⁵⁷ The characters are well-drawn, the character of Oedipus being still an inspiration to writers.

The Antigone is another great play. The action takes place on the day after a battle between her brothers, Eteocles and Polyneices, who are doomed to tragic deaths, because they

⁵⁶ Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill Jr., The Complete Greek Drama, I, p. 375.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 369-370.

are the sons of Oedipus whose sins will be visited upon his family. Antigone wishes to give her brother Eteocles, who has been killed by Polyneices, full rites of burial, but Creon refuses to give her permission since Eteocles had been fighting against his native state. Sophocles universalizes the conflict until it becomes a question of whether man-made laws or God's laws should have precedence. Creon is truly a tragic figure who realizes his guilt and assumes full responsibility for it.⁵⁸

The Electra of Sophocles differs only in minor respects from the play of the same name by Aeschylus. The action opens with the return of Orestes, whom Electra had sent away as a child to save him from Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. The play deals with the murdering of the latter two by Orestes as an act of revenge for the death of his father Agamemnon. Sophocles was interested in the psychological study, on the human level, of individuals caught in this particular situation.⁵⁹

Oedipus at Colonus was the last Sophoclean play. It is concerned with the last hours of Oedipus and based upon the legend that Oedipus was buried at Colonus. After Oedipus had blinded himself, he had left his throne and country, since many including his sons, felt he would bring misfortune on Thebes, by his unhappy presence. Antigone is his only companion. As the play develops, the oracles decree that in whatever city Oedipus dies and is buried, that city will have good

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 370.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 503-504.

fortune. Polyneices comes to Colonus to ask for Oedipus' help, but he receives only curses. The play reaches great poetic heights; the characters are well portrayed (Oedipus is a truly noble tragic figure), and Sophocles shows in a truly dramatic manner the nature of the gods' ways to men and man's moral responsibility to the world.⁶⁰

Euripides is by far the most realistic of the tragedians and is most nearly comparable to modern tragedians.⁶¹ His dramas reflect a more cosmopolitan age and are forerunners of modern tragedy. Compared with Aeschylus and Sophocles, Euripides is a realist. His characters are realistic rather than superhuman, representing every class of society and every type of human nature.⁶² He is realistic in his use of the traditional legendary material, and he changes some of the legends to make them more typical of life. He has Electra married to a peasant, for example.

In his scenes of violent and uncontrolled passions and emotions, his naturalism is most impressive. Sophocles and Aeschylus confined themselves to the spiritual aspects of great emotion, but Euripides depicts these emotions, in their raging and devastating power, as causes for disease and madness. In Aeschylus the frenzy of Orestes is depicted as a weird

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 504.

⁶¹ Albert E. Haigh, The Tragic Drama of the Greeks, p. 217.

⁶² Ibid., p. 219.

supernatural event, caused by a visitation of the gods; in Euripides, the case is treated as one of ordinary delirium produced by natural causes.⁶³

He is also distinguished by his sentimentality, for he is very sympathetic and tender, more like some of the modern writers. His sentimentality is evident in his treatment of women and of sexual love. Perhaps he could be called the creator of the modern love drama.⁶⁴

He gave a fresh development to tragedy by transferring the conflict to the human soul, and by identifying the struggle of mankind, not with the visitations of the gods or fate, but with the evil suggestions of their own minds.⁶⁵

Many of his tragedies have more complex plots than those of Sophocles, and for the first time in the development of tragedy, an element of curiosity and suspense concerning the outcome was aroused. His principal innovation in the form of tragedy was the use of prologues and epilogues, much in the same manner that later dramatists used them; that is, to take the place of our modern programs and to supplement the narrative. The chorus was gradually excluded until it became a mere musical interlude.⁶⁶

63 Ibid., pp. 219-221.

64 Ibid., p. 222.

65 Ibid., p. 224.

66 Ibid., pp. 244-255.

His language was melodious and graceful but often too ornate and forensic. Apparently enjoying the sounds of words, he used many sonorous phrases.⁶⁷

He was advanced in his moral and religious ideas and could not accept all of the ancient conceptions; he was against oracles, seers and soothsayers; he did accept some of the old established beliefs, however, for in his Orestes he shows the greatness of Apollo's wisdom. Perhaps it was because of the difficulty in reconciling the old and the new which gave some of his tragedies their note of uncertainty concerning how far the deities enter into the control of men's affairs.⁶⁸

Fond of stating his own political and social opinions, he often had his characters state his own ideas in a manner similar to the characters of the modern George Bernard Shaw. He believed that democracy was important; he wanted peace, and he hated tyranny.⁶⁹ Although he felt that vengeance was the greatest prize that the gods could bestow, he was very humane in some of his ideas.

His Alcestis is about a woman who is willing to go to death in place of her husband, who is to be saved only if he can find someone to take his place and to die for him. The problem raised here by Euripides is: What happens to the in-

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 257.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 270.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 274.

dividual who accepts the benefits of sacrifice? For before the end of the play *Admetus*, Alcestis' husband, realizes his own weakness; Euripides introduces a tragi-comic role in the part of Heracles who rescues Alcestis.

The play Andromache is interesting in subject matter, but is rather loosely handled in structure. So many new characters are introduced throughout the play that the plot is difficult to follow. This is one of the reasons why Euripides did not rise to the heights of Sophocles.

The Electra presents an interesting comparison and contrast to the other Electra plays. Euripides has Electra forced into marriage to a peasant by Aegisthus, who hopes she will thereby be unable to offer any competition for the throne. Orestes returns, and he and Electra plot the death of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. Their punishment for this deed results in the permanent separation of the brother and sister.

Aeschylus, in treating this same story, was interested in the problem of evil and the nature of the "Supreme evil" and the nature of the "Supreme Being"; Sophocles was interested in a psychological study of his main character, and Euripides, who is also interested in the psychology involved, shows what happens to people who have lived for years with the single over-powering desire of exacting revenge; and, also, what happens to them once this desire is fulfilled.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill, The Complete Greek Drama, II, p. 63.

The Orestes of Euripides is a study in abnormal psychology and shows the insanity of Orestes whose mind has broken down as a result of his awful deeds. The play is melodramatic at times, and at other times, becomes involved in cold formal debate.

In summary, then, Euripides was a great artist, and at the same time a realist; a man very much aware of the changing world about him and becoming critical and analytical at times. He was often unconventional and had to stand harsh criticism for this characteristic. He made several important innovations in the themes and structure of the drama, and was criticized for them. But he must be given credit by all, for being the predecessor of modern tragedy.

In this chapter no mention of Eugene O'Neill has been made; no comparisons, contrasts, or allusions suggested, but each of the characteristics and plays of the dramatists discussed have some bearing upon the next chapters of this thesis.

CHAPTER IV
THE TRAGEDY OF EUGENE O'NEILL

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As has been stated in the introduction, it is very difficult to arrive at any definite opinion concerning Eugene O'Neill and his plays. He is too close to our time to enable us to consider his works in their proper perspective, and thus they cannot be treated with the same finality that one can use in the analysis of Greek tragedy.

However, although critics do vary considerably in their opinions of Eugene O'Neill's work, they are unanimous on two points: he is our greatest living tragedian, and his tragedies are genuine tragedies.⁷¹ With these two thoughts in mind it seems justifiable to consider the work of this man in the same paper with the works of the Greek dramatists.

Although of necessity O'Neill's contributions to the drama are not as startling as those of the Greeks, he is given credit for several important ones. Many critics, when telling of his contributions, begin by listing his stage innovations: such as the use of the drums off stage in Emperor Jones; the unusual use of the aside and the soliloquy in Strange Interlude; the use of masks in The Great God Brown and Lazarus Laughed; the unusual stage setting of Dynamo, but the more astute dramatic critics have found that in most of these instances

⁷¹ Joseph Wood Krutch, The American Drama Since 1918 (New York: Random House, 1939) p. 317.

these were not complete innovations but revivals used in a slightly unique way.

Thus, it would seem that O'Neill's contributions lie not so much in the field of new stage techniques as in his treatment of tragedy. He alone among the contemporary dramatists seems to have grasped the true meaning of tragedy.

Lionel Trilling says:

Tragedy is the recognition of the irrational nature of things which puts so large a discrepancy between man's desire and his accomplishment. The knowledge of the tragic basis of life makes us more complete men; in our time there are few who stand with O'Neill as propagandists of that knowledge.⁷²

In the first chapter it was stated that true tragedy involves struggles and conflicts of a universal nature: struggles between man and God; man and Fate; man and Nature.

Alan D. Mickle, in his study of Eugene O'Neill says, speaking of the play, Anna Christie:

All the great human dramatists are merely copyists of the master-dramatist's [Nature], ways. The great Greeks were; Shakespeare was; Ibsen was; so in our own time, as he shows in his play, Anna Christie, Eugene O'Neill is When we turn to Anna Christie, we find the same rare quality that Shakespeare had, that Nature has. Here, apparently alone amongst living dramatists, is one who knows how to use Nature's Methods, how to handle and throw the great light.⁷³

⁷² Eugene O'Neill, Three Plays by Eugene O'Neill (New York: Random House, 1937, Introduction by Lionel Trilling) p. XIX.

⁷³ Alan D. Mickle, Studies on Six Plays of Eugene O'Neill (New York: Horace Liveright, 1929) p. 20.

In writing of Beyond the Horizon Arthur Quinn says that O'Neill "fulfills the most severe test of tragedy, which has come down to us from the Greeks, that it purifies us through our sympathy and suffering".⁷⁴

Thus in reminding the contemporary world of what real tragedy is composed, O'Neill has made an outstanding contribution to drama. O'Neill has diminished the importance of the characters in his plays by giving more prominence to his study of life rather than people. In most of his plays the characters are important only as he shows them grappling with some great force or power. This contribution to modern drama has made present-day authors realize that a too subtle analysis of character detracts from the classic simplicity of the ancient tragedy. This does not necessarily mean that O'Neill's characters are without interest or individuality, but simply they are subordinate to the great struggle which predominates the play.

Another way in which O'Neill has elevated or contributed to tragedy is his emphasis on the fact that really great tragedy must portray man in the grip of strong passion. Shaw, Galsworthy, and even Ibsen were too concerned with making their plays "mean something" while O'Neill's plays "mean something" only in the sense that Oedipus, Hamlet, or Macbeth means --that is, that human beings become almost superhuman creatures

⁷⁴ Arthur H. Quinn, A History of the American Drama--From the Civil War to the Present Day (New York: F. S. Crofts and Co., 1936) pp. 172-3.

when they are involved in the grip of great passions.⁷⁵ In Mourning Becomes Electra we see the effect of such passions upon at least two of the main characters, Lavinia and Orin. Because O'Neill fails to follow the crowd by emphasizing passions rather than "meaning" may never be as popular in his own day as his contemporaries, but his plays and name will be connected with real tragedy long after the others are gone.⁷⁶

Behind all of these contributions lies this fact: Eugene O'Neill dares to experiment. He is constantly trying new forms or perhaps old forms in new settings, and although he is not always successful, as no experimenter is, he reaches greater heights than those who trod the easy path of conservatism.

An introduction to some of his major plays may prove to be a suggestive background for further discussion. It is difficult to decide which of O'Neill's plays become most meaningful in gaining a true picture of his work, for almost every one of his plays has its interesting points.

O'Neill himself has selected what he considers his most representative plays for a "Modern Library" edition, and perhaps it might be well to be guided by this selection in our brief consideration.

⁷⁵ Eugene O'Neill, Nine Plays of Eugene O'Neill (New York: Random House, 1932, With Introduction by Joseph Wood Krutch) pp. XXI-XXII.

⁷⁶ Alan D. Mickel, Studies on Six Plays of Eugene O'Neill, p. 38.

The first play, Emperor Jones, is a one-act play which becomes a study of fear. It is unusual in form for with the exception of the first and last scenes, it is primarily a monologue. The "emperor" is a negro who has fled America to escape punishment for a murder. He has, through his superior intelligence, become the "emperor" of a small island in the West Indies. As the play opens, the natives are about to rebel against his tyranny, and he decides to escape before they kill him. The rest of the play is concerned with his attempts to escape through the dangerous jungle. Superstition and fear finally conquer him, and he becomes the victim of the natives. Perhaps the plot is not unusual, but the achievement of tragic intensity is attained through the beating of the natives' drums which increase in tempo as the intensity of fear and excitement mounts. There is something truly tragic about this man who is so proud of his mind and his craft, so superior to that of the natives, going down before the fear and hysteria which have been deep within him.

The Hairy Ape may also be classified as a one-act play, although it is divided into eight scenes. Here again our attention is centered on one character, "Yank", a stoker in the hold of a transatlantic liner. Yank is a person of brute strength, and he glories in his physical domination over his co-workers. It is only when Mildred, a sneering aristocrat, refers to him as a "hairy ape" that Yank begins to wonder if his physical strength is all that is to be desired in life.

For the rest of the play, he is seeking a class of society to which he feels he truly belongs, for the comrades of the stokehold now seem unsatisfactory and inferior. Failing to find his place during his wanderings from such extremes as the crowds in Fifth Avenue to the crowds in the slums, he goes to the zoo. There he finds a gorilla, and Yank feels at last he has found the place where he truly belongs. As he enters the cage of the gorilla, "he shakes hands" with the animal and is crushed to death.

There is evidence of O'Neill's poetic power in this play as shown through the speeches of "Paddy", a fellow stoker, as he describes the days of the old sailboats, and in Yank's replies to Paddy in his defense of their boat, we find real beauty. And again we sense the symbolism present. O'Neill himself said:

' . . . it [speaking of Yank] was symbol of man, who has lost his old harmony with nature, the harmony which he used to have as an animal and has not yet acquired in a spiritual way.'⁷⁷

All God's Chillun Got Wings is a two-act play concerned with the relationships of the negro and the white. This play concerns the tragic results that occur when too intimate relationships take place between the races. O'Neill does not rise to the heights of great tragedy here, for he becomes, like many other contemporaries writers, too concerned with a lesson or an idea and loses the objectivity which is needed in true

⁷⁷ Frank H. O'Hara, Today in American Drama (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939) p. 243.

tragedy. The struggles and passions of the leading characters are merely pathetic, not tragic, and so the play loses its effectiveness. One redeeming feature in the play is the beauty of Jim's loyalty to Ella who is not capable of standing up under the pressure of criticism that their love brings. O'Neill often finds beauty in unexpected places which adds immeasurably to his writings. Other than for this latter characteristic, the play is relatively unimportant in a consideration of O'Neill's plays.

Desire Under The Elms is one of O'Neill's plays which has been a great subject of controversy, and perhaps a true evaluation of its worth has not yet been found, but, undoubtedly, it has the elements of great tragedy. Boston banned this play when it was first published, but, and this is interesting, it was put back on the market when a chorus of voices said it had the qualities of a Greek tragedy.

The action of the play takes place in, and immediately outside of, the Cabot farmhouse in New England, in the year 1850.⁷⁸ The play deals with the incestuous love that Eben, the son of Ephraim Cabot, has for his father's second wife, Abbie. It shows what evil develops from this love and what unhappiness it brings. The setting, the plot, the poetry of the play put it into the classification of great tragedy, for here we have a man involved in great passions, and in a great struggle. In

⁷⁸ Eugene O'Neill, Nine Plays by Eugene O'Neill, p.136.

the next chapter, it will be pointed out just how this play reaches its great heights through the influence of Greek drama.

Marco Millions is a satire on the modern businessman who in his greed and love of money continues to lose sight of the aesthetic and beautiful in life. The principal character, Marco Polo, grows to manhood losing rapidly any sentiment and love which were native to him, under the tutelage of his money-conscious father and uncle. The play has some clever bits of irony, some beautiful poetic passages, but it lacks the depth and emotion that is apparent in some of O'Neill's other plays.

The Great God Brown is considered by Barrett Clark, "the most subtly beautiful work O'Neill has ever written."⁷⁹ Although this would seem a strong statement to some critics, he backs up his assertion by reference to O'Neill's "vibrant lyrical style" and his "mystically ecstatic tone" employed throughout. In this tragedy, which Mr. Clark calls a "dramatic hymn to man's struggle to identify himself with nature", Billy Brown, the practical unromantic soul is being contrasted with Dion Anthony, the idealistic, the aesthetic. The name, Dion Anthony, is a combination of "Dionysus" and "St. Anthony", thereby showing that Dion is the "creative pagan". Cybel, the prostitute, is an incarnation of Cybele, the "Earth Mother",

⁷⁹ Barrett H. Clark, Eugene O'Neill (New York: Robert McBride and Company, 1927) p. 95.

who alone understands the pagan spirit of Dion.⁸⁰

In this play O'Neill used masks for the first time as a means of dramatizing the transfer of personality which takes place. Often the mask is dropped and the audience glimpses the inner self of the person of which his fellow actors are unaware.

The play is deeply tragic, but, as in all great plays it ends on a note of triumph which makes its effect ennobling and exultant. The timelessness of Cybel's last speech is beautiful and strikes the keynote of the play.

Always spring comes again bearing life!
Always again! Always, always forever again!--
Spring again!--life again! and summer and
fall and death and peace again! . . . --but
always, always, love and conception and birth
and pain again--bearing the glorious blazing
crown of life again!⁸¹

The play is truly a magnificent poem of life, full of irony which is bitter and grim at times, but handled with care and delicacy. And with his use of masks he moved the drama "as an expressive art-medium a step forward."⁸²

Lazarus Laughed has been an almost impossible play to produce on the stage partly because of the demands made upon the leading characters, and partly because of the large stage needed for the important choral work. It has been suggested that this play will be a great success in the theaters of

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 95-96.

⁸¹ Eugene O'Neill, Nine Plays By Eugene O'Neill, p.375.

⁸² Alan D. Mickle, Studies on Six Plays by Eugene O'Neill, p. 68.

tomorrow.⁸³ It might also be possible that in this quasi-Greek play, O'Neill had the arrangements of the Greek stage in mind.

The plot is centered about Lazarus of Bethany who has arisen from the grave, and now that he has lost his fear of death, he has become a man whose life is filled with joy and laughter. The play describes the effect of his philosophy upon others, and the tragedy lies in man's inability to recognize his chance for happiness when it is presented to him.

Masks are worn by the Choruses in this play to show the seven periods of life: Boyhood (or Girlhood); Youth, Young manhood (or Womanhood); Middle Age, Maturity and Old Age; and each of these periods is represented by seven different masks of general types of character as follows: The Simple; Ignorant; the Happy, Eager; the Self-tortured, Introspective; the Proud, Self-Reliant; the Servile; Hypocritical; the Revengeful, Cruel; the Sorrowful, Resigned.⁸⁴

Time alone will determine the fate of this spectacular play.

The theme of Strange Interlude is very well-expressed by one of the main characters, Charles Marsden, as he looks back upon the incidents of the play:

After all, dear Nina, there is something unreal in all that has happened since you first met Gordon Shaw, something extravagant and

⁸³ Elizabeth S. Sergeant, Fire Under The Andes, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927) p. 112.

⁸⁴ Eugene O'Neill, Nine Plays By Eugene O'Neill, p.381.

fantastic--the sort of thing that isn't done in afternoons. So let you and me forget the whole distressing episode, regard it as an interlude of trial and preparation say, in which our souls have been scraped of clean impure flesh and made worthy to bleach in peace.⁸⁵

O'Neill is describing the "strange interlude" which is the period between birth and death, of these certain characters. He uses the aside and the soliloquy to show the inner thoughts of his characters, giving a "stream of consciousness" effect; and, although the play is criticized as being outside the average man's experience, O'Neill proves the mental interplay caused by the action, many of the basic truths of human nature.⁸⁶

The characters, as a whole, seem to be pawns in the hands of some malignant fate which is driving them on to ultimate tragedy, but if each character is considered individually, he seems to be typical of many people one might know.

The plot tells of Nina Leeds and the four men in her life. Each man has his own peculiar relationship to her, and each man is needed by her in her attempt to overcome her tragic destiny. The play is gripping and intense, revolting to many critics, but again demonstrating O'Neill's ability to portray life and its struggles in a dramatic manner.

The last play in this collection is the now famous trilogy, Mourning Becomes Electra. This is one of the major

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 681.

⁸⁶ Alan D. Mickle, Studies on Six Plays of Eugene O'Neill, p. 147.

plays of O'Neill, and one of the most important to the development of this thesis.

As its title suggests, the play is based almost incident for incident on the old Greek play. Although O'Neill sets his action in New England, just after the Civil War, the story and stage setting are still Greek in action and atmosphere. His "Orestes" is called "Orin", his "Electra" is "Lavinia", his "Clytemnestra" is "Christine", and his "Agamemnon", "Ezra". The plot development remains the same. Christine murders Ezra, and Lavinia persuades Orin to bring about the death of their mother.

The play is really divided into three plays with a separate title for each, although the characters are the same, and the action is continuous throughout. The play moves forward swiftly, and the tension mounts steadily, giving the effect of the great tragedies of the past. Mr. Krutch says it is perhaps for this very reason that O'Neill shows he has advanced one step beyond Strange Interlude in his effort to discover the modern equivalent for Aeschylus or Shakespeare.⁸⁷

Thus we have a brief summary of O'Neill's major plays: Ile, the story of a man obsessed with one desire; The Straw, the story of a girl who near death gains the love she has long desired; and Anna Christie, the story of a girl who "goes wrong" because of her heredity and her environment; are all important plays too, in some respects, but perhaps are not as significant in an analysis of O'Neill's work as a whole.

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. XIX-XX.

CHAPTER V
THE INFLUENCE OF GREEK TRAGEDY
UPON EUGENE O'NEILL

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Was Eugene O'Neill influenced by Greek tragedy? At least he seems to think so. Consider his following statements:

. . . But where I feel myself most neglected is just where I set most store by myself--as a bit of a poet who has labored with the spoken word to evolve original rhythms of beauty where beauty apparently isn't--Jones, Ape, God's Chillun, Desire, etc., and to see the transfiguring nobility of tragedy, in as near the Greek sense as one can grasp it, in seemingly the most ignoble debased lives. And just here is where I am a most confirmed mystic, too, for I'm always trying to interpret Life in terms of lives, never just lives in terms of character. I'm always acutely conscious of the Force behind--(Fate, God, our biological past creating our present, whatever one calls it--Mystery certainly) and of the one eternal tragedy of man in his glorious, self-destructive struggle to make the Force express him instead of being, as an animal is, an infinitesimal incident in its expression.⁸⁸

This statement clearly indicates some of the same ideals and characteristics of the Greek tragedians, especially his reference to his attempt to see "the transfiguring nobility of tragedy", his attempt to "interpret Life in terms of lives", and his consciousness of the "Force" behind the universe.

Apparently he was well-read in the Greek drama, too, for he says:

⁸⁸ Arthur H. Quinn, A History of the American Drama--From the Civil War to the Present Day, II, p. 196.

I read about everything I could lay my hands on: the Greeks, the Elizabethans,-- practically all of the classics, and of course all the moderns--Ibsen, Strindberg, especially Strindberg.⁸⁹

After having been asked what has most influenced his dramas, O'Neill replied,

I would say that what has influenced my plays the most is my knowledge of the drama of all times--particularly Greek tragedy--and not any books of psychology.⁹⁰

Thus it is evident that Eugene O'Neill himself feels that Greek tragedy has had a definite influence upon his plays. By examining his work it may be seen whether or not there is internal evidence of this influence.

Many of his stage techniques and devices seem to show the Greek influence. As has been indicated, the Greeks used masks. They were for the purpose of helping the audience determine the nature of the actor. O'Neill does this, too, in The Great God Brown and gives them even more significance by indicating the personalities under the masks. In Lazarus Laughed, the masks determine the seven periods of life and emphasize the symbolism of the entire play. O'Neill is not using these masks as an added attraction, as some have believed, but he is using them, to reveal his characters more

⁸⁹ Ernest Boyd, editor, Modern American Writers (New York: Robert M. McBride and Company, 1927) p. 17.

⁹⁰ Arthur H. Nethercot, "O'Neill on Freudianism", The Saturday Review of Literature, 8-2: 759, May 28, 1932.

adequately; he perhaps saw that as the Greeks could more clearly show the outer nature of their characters by masks, so he would be able to show both the inner and the outer nature of his characters.

He was also influenced by the Greek Chorus and uses this idea in several of his plays. In Lazarus Laughed, in the stage directions he indicates that several choruses are grouped about the stage. The chorus opens the play with a chant, stretching their arms towards Lazarus. With just such simple movements, the choruses of the Greek tragedians opened their plays. Throughout this play it is the chorus that gives the play its beautiful lyrical element. Even the allusions and language seem to resemble some of the Greek lyrics. For instance:

Soon the God comes!
Redeemer and Saviour
Dionysus, Son of Man and God.⁹¹

And later:

Son of the Lightning
Deadly thy vengeance!
Swift thy deliverance!
Beholding thy Mother
Greece, our Mother,
Her beauty in bondage,
Her pride in chains!
Hasten, Redeemer!⁹²

⁹¹ Eugene O'Neill, Nine Plays By Eugene O'Neill, p.407.

⁹² Ibid., p. 410.

In Mourning Becomes Electra, the chorus is a group of townspeople, as O'Neill says, speaking of Amos Ames, Louisa, and Minnie,

. . . these last three are types of townsfolk rather than individuals, a chorus representing the town come to look and listen and spy on the rich and exclusive Mannons.⁹³

Seth Beckwith acts as a leader of the chorus, and it is often by what he says that we sense what is to happen; just as the choruses of the Greeks set the mood of the play and acted as interested spectators, so do Seth and his Chorus. In the very first scene, as Seth is speaking of the Mannons, we sense approaching evil or doom. Louisa mentions Christina (the "Clytemnestra" of O'Neill's play), and the effect of her evil nature is evident in Seth's attitude and reply.

Seth. (his face growing grim--sharply) Never mind her. We ain't talkin' about her
(Then abruptly changing the subject),
etc.

Throughout the play when anything of importance happens, Seth and his choruses have their comments. Near the end of the play he says:

There's been evil in that house since it was first built in hate--and it's kept growin' there ever since, and what's happened there has proved.⁹⁴

⁹³ Ibid., pp. 688-689.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 822.

This last statement also reminds us of the Greek idea of a curse descending upon a family and following it down through the ages. Sophocles said, "Once a House has suffered the shock of a great god's wrath, the curse pursues its children even to the very last."⁹⁵

In the little-known play, The Fountain, there is a chant that runs through the play as a lyrical choric comment on the theme:

Love is a flower
 Forever blooming
 Beauty is a fountain
 Forever flowing
 Upward into the source of sunshine
 One with God but
 Ever returning
 To kiss the earth that the flowers may live.⁹⁶

His asides and soliloquies have been mentioned before as having been used in Strange Interlude. They were also used in Days Without End and Dynamo to reveal the inner thoughts and nature of the character involved. Some people have thought that these asides were superfluous, but there is just as much logic in that statement as there would be to say that the asides of Shakespeare are superfluous.⁹⁷ And, as for the Greeks there are the long dramatic soliloquies such as the one

⁹⁵ John Corbin, "O'Neill and Aeschylus", The Saturday Review of Literature, 8:693-5, April 30, 1932.

⁹⁶ Barrett H. Clark, Eugene O'Neill, p. 93.

⁹⁷ George J. Nathan, "Case of O'Neill," American Mercury 13:500-2, April, 1928.

by Ajax just before he commits suicide.⁹⁸ Surely, this soliloquy reveals the man's inner nature and thoughts as do the asides in O'Neill's plays.

Often O'Neill's settings and backgrounds seem to indicate the Greek influence. The drums which provide the background of The Emperor Jones have the same effect upon the mind of the Emperor that the chorus's chants have upon the mind of Orestes. Both are driven to the point of insanity by their relentless pursuers. O'Neill is showing that it is really fear and superstition which make the drums seem louder and louder to the Emperor, but there is no more chance of escape from his ultimate fate than there is of Orestes escaping his avenging Furies.

The best example of a stage set, illustrating the Greek influence, in O'Neill's plays is to be found in Mourning Becomes Electra. The scene is as follows:

Exterior of the Mannon house on a late afternoon in April, 1865. At front is the driveway which leads up to the house from the two entrances on the street. Behind the driveway the white Grecian temple portico with its six tall columns extends across the stage⁹⁹

In Lazarus Laughed there is a resemblance to the Greek stage when the latter had its chief actors and chorus on the stage, for Lazarus is sitting on a raised platform in the

⁹⁸ Whitney Oates and Eugene O'Neill, The Complete Greek Drama, p. 341.

⁹⁹ Eugene O'Neill, Nine Plays by Eugene O'Neill, p. 687.

center of the stage (where the leading Greek actor would stand) and his choruses are in groups about the stage. A large stage would be necessary to produce the same effect that was created on the Greek stage. As the average spectator views this play, his immediate reaction is, "Here is a Greek play". This is the right reaction, of course, because O'Neill follows this form throughout the remainder of the play.

The scenes which take place in the "Little Throne Room" in Marco Millions are suggestive of the Greek stage. The central figure, The Khan, is in the center of the stage on an elevation, and his subjects group around him, as a chorus to listen to his decrees.

Then the symbolism in O'Neill's plays makes one think of the symbolism one may find in the Greek plays. In The Emperor Jones the Emperor becomes symbolical of all men, with their superstitious fears and ignorance underlying the layers of intellect. Like Oedipus, the Emperor is proud of his intellect and is always boasting about his mind and his superior craft which caused him to become the king of the island.¹⁰⁰ The beat of the drums pursuing him through the jungle is Fate, as the Furies of Orestes are "avenging fates".

If we consider The Emperor Jones as a kind of philosophic masque, it comes to much the same conclusion that Sophocles reached (though simpler

¹⁰⁰ Eugene O'Neill, Three Plays by Eugene O'Neill, p. XI.

and less suggestive): that that rational intellect of man is not able to cope with the inscrutable ways of life.¹⁰¹

Death is a character in Alcestis by Euripides, and Death haunts most of the plays of Eugene O'Neill.¹⁰² From the beginning of The Hairy Ape when Yank sets out to find where he belongs in the world, Death is at his shoulder. When he finally "takes" Yank, we experience a feeling of triumph for at last Yank "belongs".

In Dynamo O'Neill combines the lust for knowledge and power in the symbol of the murderous dynamo--god. In Prometheus Bound, Power and Force become characters, for Aeschylus felt that it was not necessary to give these symbols, names as O'Neill does.

In Desire Under the Elms the leading characters who have been evil and seen evil and sordidness in the world, suddenly at the end of the play appreciate the beautiful sunset, for there is something in the human spirit, implies O'Neill, which is always groping upward. Here is a spirit which Aeschylus could understand.¹⁰³

Most of the great plays of the past use Nature to give a background to the play. Sophocles describes the beautiful countryside of Colonus, making us aware that this serenity and

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. XII.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. XV.

¹⁰³ Walter P. Eaton, "New Risen Attic Stream?" American Scholar, 6, no. 3:304-12, 1937.

beauty are fitting in the land where Oedipus is to die.

Shakespeare has a wild storm as a background to the passions of King Lear. In Anna Christie, the fog becomes symbolical of the bewilderment of old Chris. He says, "Fog, fog, fog, all bloody time. You can't see where you was going, no. . ."¹⁰⁴

In The Emperor Jones it is the dark forest closing in around Jones which becomes symbolic; it is the view from the farm in Beyond the Horizon; in Desire Under the Elms the two elm trees shading the house.

Many of O'Neill's plays have been adversely criticized because of the "horror" element. In Desire Under the Elms there are murder and incest. In Mourning Becomes Electra there are murder, incest, and suicide. In The Hairy Ape the horror of Yank's death as he is crushed by the gorilla is more than some spectators can bear. They say, "Why does O'Neill have such horrible scenes upon the stage? It isn't true to life, and we don't like it."

However, the Greek plays could have been and could be criticized in the same manner. The adventures of Oedipus or Jason do not portray the typical home life of a Greek any more than Yank's death is a typical occurrence today. These legends of Oedipus and Jason were already archaic and remote to the Greek audiences. The Greeks disliked actual horror

¹⁰⁴ Alan D. Mickle, Studies on Six Plays of Eugene O'Neill, p. 21.

scenes on the stage itself, and the scene of Oedipus with his bleeding eyes must have been of "nightmarish" quality as the horror scenes of O'Neill may be.¹⁰⁵ The Greeks realized, as critics today should, that the horror scenes are not used by great dramatists as merely "added attractions" but to add to the general theme and atmosphere of the play. Alan D. Mickle says that real drama must show man suffering and even dying, but this man must "suffer heroically and die gloriously" to be a fitting subject for true tragedy.¹⁰⁶ He goes on to say that the dramatic method of accomplishing this function is by contrast.

It [drama] will make its hero suffer to show how he can endure suffering. It will make him weak to show him fighting against weakness It will take man down to the utmost depths of life that the better might be illuminated for him--the heights.¹⁰⁷

Tragic irony as a characteristic of style is handled well by O'Neill. This device, as has been mentioned, was a favorite device of Sophocles. The supreme example of Sophocles' irony as it appeared in Oedipus Rex has already been given. Let us examine examples of O'Neill's use of tragic irony.

In the play Ile Captain Kenney is obsessed with the idea of getting his whaling oil back to "Homeport". His wife

¹⁰⁵ Joseph W. Krutch, The American Drama Since 1918, p.98.

¹⁰⁶ Alan D. Mickle, Studies on Six Plays of Eugene O'Neill, p. 16.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 16.

is aboard ship with him, and they have been on the north seas, surrounded by ice, for weeks. He is waiting for the ice to break to the north, so that he can get his "ile". She is slowly going insane under the existing conditions. Finally because he loves her, he gives the orders to start for home, although it is a great blow to his pride to return without the "ile". Right after the order is given the ice begins to break to the north, and the Captain makes his decision to go back for the "ile". His wife, who is the victim of these ironic circumstances goes insane, as the curtain descends.

There is an even better example of tragic irony in the play, The Great God Brown. At the climax of the play, after a highly exalted speech by Cybel at the death of Brown, whose life and death she says is symbolical of Man throughout eternity, a police captain enters, hearing her shots.

Captain. (Comes just into sight at left and speaks front without looking at them--gruffly) Well, what's his name?

Cybel. Man! (She is still in a highly exalted state)

Captain. (taking a grimy notebook and an inch-long pencil from his pocket) How d'yuh spell it?¹⁰⁸

The complete lack of understanding and comprehension of the police captain, who is possibly symbolical of the average man, furnishes the bitterness of this example of irony. Many other examples of O'Neill's use of this stylistic technique could be given.

¹⁰⁸ Eugene O'Neill, Nine Plays By Eugene O'Neill, p. 375.

The characters created by O'Neill are interesting, too, in the light of the thesis.

Sophus Winther, in writing of the nobility of O'Neill's characters, mentions the Greek influence to be found here.

From Robert in Beyond the Horizon to Lavinia in Mourning Becomes Electra all his characters are rebels against the cruel tyranny of false ideals. The fierce will to live which was thwarted by the Puritanism of her past life could not break Lavinia's spirit. When the gods, in the Aeschylean sense, had finished their sport with her, she entered her house and accepted her doom. She did not submit in meekness but with courage, defiance¹⁰⁹

In Mourning Becomes Electra O'Neill is much more interested in Electra than in Orestes. In this respect he is following Euripides rather than Aeschylus, as he does in the rest of the play.¹¹⁰ He does this, because she leads her brother on to commit murder and seems to be the stronger of the two in her intense hatred.

Old Ephraim, near the end of Desire Under The Elms, identifies himself with God, even though he has seemed a hard evil character throughout the play, because he thinks God is "hard and lonesome", too. Although this may seem absurd in one sense, in another this identification gives dignity and elevation to his character. Thus even in defeat there is

¹⁰⁹ Sophus Winther, Eugene O'Neill--A Critical Study, (New York: Random House, 1934) pp. 81-82.

¹¹⁰ Walter P. Eaton, "New Risen Attic Stream?" American Scholar, 6, no. 3:304-12, 1937.

something of a spiritual victory.¹¹¹

John Corbin in an article entitled, O'Neill and Aeschylus, summarizes O'Neill's ability at characterization:

The vivid truth of his characterization expanded in proportion [to his ability to evoke atmosphere] --the starved poet and mystic of Beyond the Horizon; the love-crazed stoker of The Hairy Ape; the black Napoleon, etc. You will have to range the civilized world to find such a gallery of dramatic portraits, of dramatic passions so deep and widely varied.¹¹²

Thus O'Neill's characters in their elevation, dignity, and courage to accept their fates have qualities of the Greek dramatists' characters. They are more carefully analyzed due to the influence of modern psychology, but they have more of the superhuman qualities of the characters of the Greek plays than do the creations of other contemporary dramatists. And, as do the characters of Aeschylus and Euripides, they often give the ideas and philosophies of their creators.

Similarities in the form and structure of the O'Neill and Greek plays may be found. Euripides was noted for his use of the "deus ex machina". In the play, Ile, which has already been described, "Nature" is the deus ex machina that steps in and helps Captain Keeney determine his action at the end of the play.¹¹³ Apollo and other gods become the deus ex machina of

¹¹¹ Joseph W. Krutch, The American Drama Since 1918, pp. 99-100.

¹¹² John Corbin, "O'Neill and Aeschylus", p. 694.

¹¹³ Edd Winfield Parks, "Eugene O'Neill's Symbolism--Old Gods For New" Sewanee Review 43:436-451, October, 1935.

Euripides' plays. The entire play Ile is handled in this same classic form. There is no oversentimentality in the tragic situation; only the bare necessities are dealt with in exposition and characterization, and the play has a protagonist whose tragedy is "above that of little men".¹¹⁴

Mourning Becomes Electra as a trilogy, is in the Greek form, being divided into three parts, although O'Neill does not make his divisions in exactly the same place as Aeschylus did in the Oresteia. This was due to O'Neill's interest in Lavinia (Electra) who does not appear in The Agamemnon of Aeschylus.

The peculiar kind of suspense that O'Neill uses in this play is Greek in spirit.¹¹⁵

The playwright O'Neill has learned the adult suspense of the classics as compared with the adolescent sense of it, that reigns in the romantic drama of the North. The classic suspense has even a biological defense: you know that in life you will come to death, but just how the course of all your living will shade and fulfill itself you do not know, and you are borne up by an animal will to survive.¹¹⁶

Although the reader senses from the beginning of Mourning Becomes Electra that Lavinia and later Orin are to meet with tragic ends, there is the Greek feeling of suspense of just when and just how that end will be met.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 442.

¹¹⁵ Morton D. Zabel, editor, Literary Opinion in America (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937) p. 281.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 281-282.

Mourning Becomes Electra is like the Greek plays, in another sense. It is concerned with the great passions of man. As has been stated, the characters in this play become super-human and terrible in the grip of these emotions as do the characters, Oedipus and Macbeth in similar situations. There is something horrible to be sure about witnessing these spectacular human beings, but the effect which they have upon us is at once horrible and cleansing in the manner of the Greek catharsis.¹¹⁷

It is the opinion of most critics that Mourning Becomes Electra is the most similar in form to the Greek tragedies, but there are several who feel that Desire Under the Elms is most typical of the Greeks.

John Mason Brown is one of the latter and gives as his reason the fact that O'Neill is not "mastered by his details" but "master of them", and that he reaches a noble "austere" style of writing typical of the Greeks. He continues,

For once he advances his tragedy in the terms of people who are vibrant with the capacity of great suffering. And by doing so, he elevates a tale of wasteful murder, of mean deception, of hideous lust for possession and of gross carnal love, far above its sordid trappings and fills a drab New England farmhouse with something of the glory of a Theban palace.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Joseph Wood Krutch, The American Drama Since 1918, pp. 112-113.

¹¹⁸ John Mason Brown, Upstage, The American Theater in Performance, (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1930) p. 71.

Arthur H. Quinn says about this same play that "there can be little doubt that Greek tragedy had its influence" upon this tragedy, but he points to another reason. He feels that we shudder at the horror of Abbie's murder of her own child in the same way in which we shudder at many of the Greek situations.¹¹⁹

A Greek catharsis is apparent in Desire Under the Elms too, for after witnessing all of the horrors of the plays there is a "cleansing quality" to the last scene when Eben and Abbie, who are being led away to prison, rise above their sordidness and sin to appreciate the beauty of the sunset.

The Greek sense of pity may be felt in The Hairy Ape, although in many ways this play is too modern to be compared to the Greeks. But as O'Neill shows us an individual beaten down by the hopeless complexity of life and his highest instincts leading him to his tragic end, we cannot but feel that sense of pity which is spoken of as "Greek pity".¹²⁰

Although it is apparent there are many traces of Greek influences in the form and structure of O'Neill's plays, it is in his themes that we find the most obvious and interesting evidence.

It has been stated before that O'Neill differs from his contemporaries, because his themes are of a more universal

¹¹⁹ Arthur H. Quinn, A History of the American Drama--From Civil War to Present Day, pp. 189-190.

¹²⁰ Walter P. Eaton, "New Risen Attic Stream?" American Scholar, 6, no. 3:304-12, 1937.

nature and deal with timeless subjects and conflicts. It is perhaps his constant emphasis upon life, not individual lives, that accounts for this. As one critic has put it, he is always trying to "solve life--life and death, good and evil, spirit and flesh are of vital concern to him".¹²¹ These problems are not the problems of psychology but of religion. Even though O'Neill uses psychology to a great extent in his plays, they are fundamentally concerned with religious problems, which, of course, is basic in Greek tragedy.

In Strange Interlude O'Neill seems to capture the Greek spirit as he portrays life as a cycle. As soon as the old people go off the stage there is always a son or daughter to marry and to take the old people's places, thus completing the ever-enduring cycle. This "cycle idea" recalls the simple rites of the Greeks as they made sacrifices to the goddess of fertility. "Because O'Neill has treated life and given it meaning, he takes us back in spirit to one of the oldest religions."¹²²

In this same play there is an Oedipus complex apparent in his characters, Nina and Charlie, both of whom are unduly attached to their parent of the opposite sex and there is also the idea of hereditary insanity as the result of a curse upon a "house", as shown by Mrs. Evans and Ned.

¹²¹ Lionel Trilling, "Eugene O'Neill", New Republic, 88:176-179, September, 1936.

¹²² Edd Winfield Parks, "Eugene O'Neill's Symbolism--Old Gods For New," p. 446.

One of the main themes, running through all of O'Neill's tragedies is the conflict between Man and Fate. Fate takes various forms and shapes, but, as one considers O'Neill's plays as a whole, he becomes increasingly aware of the vast power of this Fate.

In Anna Christie it is the sea which acts as Fate. Anna who does not sense the malignancy of the sea loves it but old Chris, her father, who has been brought up on the sea senses its threat and strives throughout the play to keep Anna away from it. Unwittingly he causes her downfall by this, and, as the play ends, the audience knows that "dat ole devil, sea" has won out. The characters are grim, real, and strong, but there is a stronger will constantly in the background.¹²³

In The Hairy Ape Fate is a woman dressed in white, who appears in the stokehold where Yank is working. Up to this moment Yank had been a happy man, but when he hears her opinion of him, his life becomes utterly changed, and Fate's accusations and challenges follow him to death.

Although the protagonist in The Emperor Jones thinks he has out-witted his Fate it pursues him through the beating of the drums until it conquers him.

Many of the characters of O'Neill show a heroic ability to accept the terrible fact that Fate is against them and will

¹²³ Alan D. Mickle, Studies on Six Plays of Eugene O'Neill, pp. 21-35.

be until the end, reminding us again of Oedipus, Electra, Antigone, and other Greek characters who accepted their destiny so valiantly.

Robert, in Beyond the Horizon, who has so narrowly escaped happiness and who has endured so much pain, at the end of the play says to his "successful" brother who is really a pathetic unhappy soul, "Only through contact with constant suffering, will you awaken." His sense of the privilege of pain and suffering was as keen as that of Aeschylus.¹²⁴

Lavinia, in Mourning Becomes Electra, at the end of the play realizes what Fate has in store for her, and she prepares to face this Fate in a truly dramatic scene. (The Greek theme of a curse upon a house is significant in this scene too)

She says to Seth who is afraid she will enter the house and commit suicide:

Don't be afraid. I'm not going the way
Mother and Orin went. That's escaping punishment.
And there's no one left to punish one. I'm the
last Mannon. I've got to punish myself! Living
alone with the dead is a worse act of justice than
death or prison! I'll never go out or see anyone!
I'll have the shutters nailed closed so no sunlight
can ever get in. I'll live alone with the dead and
keep their secrets, and let them hound me, until
the curse is paid out, and the last Mannon is let
die¹²⁵

Here indeed is a complete acceptance of one's fate!

¹²⁴ John Corbin, "O'Neill and Aeschylus", p. 695.

¹²⁵ Eugene O'Neill, Nine Plays by Eugene O'Neill, p. 867.

Even though O'Neill's characters and plays seem unduly pessimistic there is always that feeling that there is happiness in the world if one can find it. In one of his early plays, The Straw, one of the leading characters asks a girl whose life has been completely tragic why we human beings are given "hopeless hopes" which merely lead us on to further disillusionment. Her answer shows her awareness of a beauty in life even though she herself has not experienced it completely. She says,

Isn't everything we know--just that--when you think of it? (Her face lighting up with a consoling revelation) But there must be something back of it--some promise of fulfillment--somehow--somewhere,--in the spirit of hope itself.¹²⁶

Once a person who apparently believed that O'Neill was unduly pessimistic asked him if he were never going to write about "happiness". In his answer we find again this desire upon his part to reach the Greek ideals. He answers the question in the following manner:

Sure, I'll write about happiness if I can happen to meet up with that luxury, and find it sufficiently dramatic and in harmony with any deep rhythm in life. But happiness is a word. What does it mean? Exaltation, an intensified feeling of the significant worth of man's being and becoming? Well, if it means that--and not a mere smirking contentment with one's lot--I know there is more of it in one real tragedy than in all the happy-ending plays ever written. It's mere present-day judgment to think of tragedy as unhappy. The Greeks and Elizabethans knew better. They felt the tremendous life to it.

¹²⁶ Barrett H. Clark, Eugene O'Neill, p. 56.

It roused them spiritually to a deeper understanding of life. Through it they found release from the petty consideration of everyday existence. They saw their lives ennobled by it. A work of art is always happy¹²⁷

Continuing with the more specific themes in O'Neill's plays, it becomes obvious that in Desire Under the Elms there are "some of the oldest and most eternally interesting tragic legends, here freshly embodied in American soil".¹²⁸ There are a struggle between a son and father, incest, and a general display of passion and emotions at work. O'Neill succeeds in placing an emphasis upon the happenings in such a way that they seem to become fundamental human problems. Because his characters are proponents of these problems, they gain stature and dignity, resembling an Oedipus or a Hamlet.¹²⁹

The identification of his characters with the soil and with certain culture traditions which come into strong conflict with their individual desires gives the play deeper meaning and importance.

Mourning Becomes Electra follows the old Greek play in many of its themes. For example, an old servant in the Aeschylean play has a line which is one of the themes of both

¹²⁷ Sophus K. Winther, Eugene O'Neill--A Critical Study, p. 216.

¹²⁸ Joseph W. Krutch, The American Drama Since 1918, p. 97.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 97.

the old and new "Electra" plays. He says, "I see the dead are killing one who lives".¹³⁰ In other words, in both plays, since the family has a curse upon it, one murder leads to another.

The theme that there is something demanded of us by the dead that we cannot betray is in both the plays.¹³¹ Lavinia feels that it is up to her to "work out" the curse until her death by giving up all the pleasures of life. The last scene of the play, in which she has all the blinds nailed shut on her house and enters it never to venture into human society again, is a truly fitting dramatic action for her decision.

It must be admitted that the peculiar kind of relationship existing between Electra and her father and Orestes and his mother has taken on a new meaning for us in the light of modern psychology, but O'Neill does this more to clarify his tragedy for a modern audience than to get away from the Greek theme. Some people have tried to point to this play as an "exposition" or a defense of a modern "psychological conception", but Mr. Krutch has made a statement in this regard which appears very trite:

It is no more an exposition or defense of a modern psychological conception than Aeschylus is an exposition or defense of the tenets of the Greek religion, even though it does accept the one as Aeschylus accepts the other. It is, on

¹³⁰ Morton D. Zabell, editor, Literary Opinion in America, p. 282.

¹³¹ Loc. Cit.

the other hand--and like all supremely great pieces of literature--primarily addressed to our interest in them.¹³²

Richard Dana Skinner in his book, A Poet's Quest, feels that in Mourning Becomes Electra O'Neill's total efforts are clearly revealed, and that in this place he is comparing the "spiritual resources of the two civilizations". Through his strong characterizations and portrayal of intense passion he makes us feel that we still have the possibilities of emotional greatness and a realization of the distinction between good and evil. Mr. Skinner says that O'Neill has also shown us that there really is not such a great distance in the two civilizations between the essential qualities of human nature as most people would believe.¹³³

One of the remarkable things about this play is that O'Neill seems to realize more than ever before that the true or classical tragedy arises from some catastrophe developing from a relationship between man and God rather than man and man. Tragedy of this type becomes more important, and characters who help to develop these struggles assume more impressiveness.¹³⁴ Mrs. Hills, one of the chorus in the play, after Ezra Mannon's death, says,

¹³² Eugene O'Neill, Nine Plays by Eugene O'Neill, pp. XIX-XX.

¹³³ Joseph W. Krutch, "A Poet's Quest by Richard Dana Skinner," Nation 141:145, October 9, 1935.

¹³⁴ Loc. Cit.

Maybe it is fate. You remember, Everett, you've always said about the Mannons that pride goeth before a fall and that some day God would humble them in their sinful pride.¹³⁵

So false pride (similar to the pride of Creon in the Antigone) along with one's sins accounts for the downfall of the Mannon household.

Another theme which interests O'Neill exceedingly, and which interested the Greeks (especially Aeschylus), is the effort to determine the nature of the power behind the universe. In one of the quotations already given in this thesis, O'Neill says that he is interested in this power, no matter by what name it may be designated. It seems as if many of his characters speak for him as they show their bewilderment about the solution to this question. Nina, in Strange Interlude, sounds pathetically bewildered as she tries to conceive of the nature of God, as we can see in her speech in Act II Scene I.

Nina. (wonderingly) Do you know what I was doing upstairs? I was trying to pray. I tried hard to pray to the modern science God. I thought of a million light years to a spiral nebula--one other universe among innumerable others. But how could that God care about our trifling misery of death--born of birth? I couldn't believe in Him¹³⁶

The play, Dynamo, has this as one of its main themes. Finally the hero who has searched and searched for the traditional God becomes discouraged and begins to worship the dynamo which symbolizes the power and force of his conceptions of a god.

¹³⁵ Eugene O'Neill, Nine Plays By Eugene O'Neill, p. 755.

¹³⁶ Eugene O'Neill, Nine Plays By Eugene O'Neill, p. 523.

This same bewilderment and questioning concerning the nature of the power behind the universe is to be found in Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound where we are concerned with the nature of Zeus, and also in Sophocles' Oedipus, when Oedipus, with his eyes out and blood streaming from their sockets appears before the chorus, asking,

What power malignant heaped
On thy poor head such
complicated woe?¹³⁷

In summarizing then, we can see that the influence of the Greek drama upon the drama of Eugene O'Neill is apparent in his stage technique and devices, in his characters, and in his themes. Many more illustrations could undoubtedly be given under each of these points, but only those which seemed necessary to substantiate the ideas were given in order to avoid monotony.

The last chapter will contain a short summary of the evidence given and an evaluation of its worth in a survey of O'Neill's plays as a whole.

¹³⁷ Sophus K. Winther, Eugene O'Neill--A Critical Study, pp. 153-4.

CHAPTER VI

A SUMMARY AND AN EVALUATION

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A SUMMARY AND AN EVALUATION

With the preceding chapters as evidence, it seems safe to state that Eugene O'Neill has been influenced by Greek tragedy. He does not "copy" the Greek tragedians, and his tragedy cannot be placed on the high level set by the early tragedians. However, he is still writing and there is much, as we have seen, in the very spirit and basis of his work which recalls the older tragedies.

In the first place, we have seen by the evidence of his own statements that he was consciously trying to capture the Greek spirit in his tragedy. In addition to what has been quoted, consider the following quotation taken from his Diary, which is typical of many quotations concerning the same subject:

Cap d'ail France, April 1929, Greek tragedy plot idea--'Lay in New England small seaport ship-building town--family town's best--shipbuilders and owners--wealthy for a period--Agamemnon character town's leading citizen, . . . house Greek temple front type . . . (New England background best possible dramatically for Greek plot of crime and retribution chain of fate. Puritan conviction of man born to sin and punishment Orestes' furies within him, his conscience, etc.)¹³⁸

O'Neill worked on this idea for a long time as proved by his diary, before he actually started to write, and it is obvious that he was doubtful about his audience's reaction to this type of play, possibly feeling that the average audience

¹³⁸ Walter P. Eaton, "New Risen Attic Stream?" American Scholar, 6, no. 3:304-12, 1937.

of today would not understand the implications of fate, sin, a family curse, which were familiar themes to the Greeks. This may account for his introduction of bits of modern psychology and religion into his plays. He knows the modern audience will appreciate and understand that. By so doing he does not lower the elevation or style of his tragedy.

It has been shown that O'Neill adopted many of the Greek stage techniques and devices, such as the use of masks, the chorus asides and soliloquies, and ideas for stage sets.

His language, although never as eloquent or grand as that of the old tragedians, is often lyrical, poetic, rhythmical and adequately indicative of the passionate nature of his characters. His use of tragic irony and music are important stylistic evidences of one who is interested in Greek drama.

But, as has been stated before, it is in the nature of his themes, ideas, and philosophy that we find the most apparent evidence.

Greek tragedy grew out of the conflict between what man knew was the good life for him, and what history and tradition said was the gods' idea of the good life.¹³⁹ Our modern age is much like the age of the Greek dramatists in this respect, and so O'Neill in showing contrasts between old and new ideals has created tragedy similar to the Greeks.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Sophus K. Winther, Eugene O'Neill--A Critical Study, p. 80.

¹⁴⁰ Loc. Cit.

It is because of his dealing with these old and fundamental problems, which to many seem trite and uninteresting, that he differs from his contemporaries. Galsworthy and Shaw, for example, deal with the things that they see about them and the problems of a purely contemporary nature. O'Neill, like Shakespeare, is a portrayer of human nature and human problems of all time.¹⁴¹

Since he deals with these fundamental problems many criticize him because he does not solve all of them for them. Neither Shakespeare nor Sophocles attempted to solve life, but we appreciate the force with which they represent life and its "moral complexity". And O'Neill has this power of portrayal.¹⁴² He and the Greeks both try to prove that in spite of life's difficulties life is good, for both are basically religious in their philosophies, although O'Neill represents modern religion and the Greeks primitive religion.

In portraying the passions and fundamental qualities of man he ties in the forces of Nature with the forces of human nature. In so doing he gives his tragedy depth and dimension. Examples of this have already been given.

It was probably the achievement of that effect called "catharsis" which first caused O'Neill to be compared with the

¹⁴¹ Alan D. Mickle, Studies on Six Plays of Eugene O'Neill, p. 38.

¹⁴² Lionel Trilling, "Eugene O'Neill", New Republic 88:176-9, September, 1936.

Greeks. For people to feel "cleansed" after viewing the spectacle of lust, murder, incest, and crime as for instance, appear in the play Desire Under the Elms, is certainly a rare experience in the theater of today. Mr. Krutch says that in this respect and his "aloofness from realism, his reflection on life rather than individuals, and his passionate aspirations of the human spirit immersed in evil, howsoever deep it be, he is certainly Greek enough to be a strange and compelling figure in our modern playhouses."¹⁴³

In many of his plays, fate and its implications have been important in the development of his themes. As this was discussed in the last chapter, it is necessary to repeat this fact only for emphasis and to add that O'Neill's fate differs from Euripides' only in that in the latter, fate is felt as a more or less capricious external power, but in O'Neill becomes the inevitable outcome character and the unavoidable condition of life.¹⁴⁴

And lastly, in connection with O'Neill's themes the fact that he is always trying to determine the nature of the divine power behind the universe and the relationship of men to this power makes us feel that he has been influenced by the Greeks. (See preceding chapter)

¹⁴³ Joseph W. Krutch, The American Drama Since 1918, p. 312.

¹⁴⁴ Sophus K. Winther, Eugene O'Neill--A Critical Study, p. 184.

How widely is this Greek influence felt in his work as a whole? One cannot answer this question specifically, of course, but since definite evidences of this spirit have been found in at least seventy-five per cent of his plays, it is safe to say that it is one of the stronger characteristics of his style. However, since he is also an experimenter and innovator in drama, he can and has been credited with such varying titles as "lying Moral Romanticist" and an "immoral violent Expressionist"; so we cannot classify him as definitely a "Greek disciple".¹⁴⁵ Also, as has been stated, he is much too contemporary to be rated and classified anyway; so time alone will prove how truly valid our suppositions concerning this great dramatist are.

We have seen by this paper, however, that the following statement by Frank O'Hara is true:

Analyze them great tragedies as we may, for whatever reason and from whatever angle, the basic qualities of tragedy remain the same: un-resolvable maladjustment whether it ends in the finality of death or a futile lingering on, the defeat of the individual by some great eternal force beyond his control grandeur of mood, and in the end that lifting of the human emotions which the Greeks called 'catharsis'. If the play is of our day, it cannot escape the vocabulary of our day--the vocabulary of ideas and attitudes and philosophic suppositions as well as of words. But the tragedy of today, if it is really great tragedy, is no more restricted by its timeliness than the older tragedies which have come down to us. For human characters--with its essential tragedy--goes on much the same.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Arthur H. Quinn, "Eugene O'Neill, Poet and Mystic", p. 368.

¹⁴⁶ Frank H. O'Hara, Today in American Drama, p. 52.

A B S T R A C T

The Influence of the Greek Technique
of Tragedy
in the Works of Eugene O'Neill

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to indicate that the modern tragedian, Eugene O'Neill, was influenced by the early Greek dramatists, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Although it is necessary to make some comparisons and contrasts between the two types of tragedy, the primary purpose is to show the influence of the dramatic technique of these early writers upon the works of Eugene O'Neill. No attempt is made to prove that the tragedies are completely comparable.

To accomplish this plan it was necessary to examine the characteristics and devices of the Greek tragedians and those of O'Neill's as evidenced in the plays of both. Due regard was given to the opinions of the critics, but as there are so many controversial elements involved here, one is forced ultimately to rely on his own judgment.

Greek tragedy is a unique form of drama in many respects, and unless its background and history are carefully studied, it becomes almost impossible to make a true evaluation of its nature.

Preceding the three great Greek dramatists by nearly three hundred years, there appeared a group of lyric poets whose poetry was not only beautiful in its expression but contained the beginnings of the philosophy which was to be developed by the three great tragedians. The tendency of lyric expression also persisted down through the centuries

as evidenced by the prevalence of chorus work to be found in Greek tragedy.

A second characteristic of Greek drama is the interest in subjects of a religious nature. This may be easily explained when one realizes that Greek drama originated in the ceremonies used in the religious festivals of the Greek people. Tragedy, as a specific branch of drama, developed from the ceremony used in the worship of Dionysus, god of fertility. It is thought that drama entered the ceremonies when one person stepped from the chorus, sang part of the service alone, possibly "acting out" some part of the narrative. Thus three important conclusions should be drawn here: first, since Greek tragedy developed from the action of the chorus, the chorus played an important part in its development; secondly, Greek tragedy had a lyrical background; and since it was religious in origin, it remained essentially religious in nature.

The plots of the Greek tragedy, contrary to many of our modern tragedies, were not original. With only four exceptions, Greek tragedy found its sources in the mythological legends of the old epic poets. As a result of this development the early dramatists were limited in subject matter, and there were a number of plays written on the same subject by different authors. Secondly, since this early epic material was confined almost entirely to the

fortunes of royal families, so this material becomes the subject matter of the early Greek plays. This source material accounts, too, for the elevated and eloquent language that one finds in the Greek drama.

Another important characteristic of this early drama is the similarity in motives in all the plays. Behind each play, "Destiny" or "Fate" is the main motive creating the action. Minor motives were inspired by the Greek interest in horror, in the supernatural world, in "splendor" or "spectacle" scenes, in human relationships or bonds, and in matters dealing with the idealization of life.

Now we are prepared to examine the outstanding characteristics of the three great tragedians--Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.

Aeschylus, one of the greatest poetic geniuses that the world has ever known, contributed much to the development of Greek drama. Through the examination of his plays (The Trilogy Oresteia, Oedipus, The Suppliants, and Prometheus Bound) we find that Aeschylus should be remembered for the following points: his introduction of the second actor; his powerful rhetorical poetry; his attempts to reconcile the differing religious views of the day, and his conception of Zeus as an unanthropomorphic deity of infinite wisdom and mercy. His Trilogy Oresteia

is significant in this thesis, because its plot was used by his two predecessors and, much later, by Eugene O'Neill. Although each later dramatist adapted it to his own means, the general idea of the effect of a curse upon a family (the House of Atreus) is followed quite faithfully.

Sophocles, the greatest of the three tragedians, seemed to possess the best qualities of Aeschylus, his predecessor, and Euripides, his follower. His craftsmanship is so nearly perfect that he is difficult to analyze. His distinguishing stylistic trait, the use of tragic irony, is employed by O'Neill today. By an analysis of his plays (The Electra, Oedipus Rex, The Antigone, Oedipus at Colonus) we find that Sophocles was interested in the passions and inner traits of man; the effect of "Fate" upon man's life; the nature of the gods' treatment of man; and the nature of man's responsibility to the Gods and the world.

Euripides is the most modern of the tragedians. His dramas reflect a more cosmopolitan age. His use of realism, and his almost modern psychological approach make it apparent that he is one of the forerunners of modern tragedy. His Orestes, Alcestis, Andromache, and Electra reveal the following characteristics: he was a great artist and at the same time a realist; he was a man very critical of the changing world about him; and he was often unconventional introducing modern themes and techniques.

Has our modern tragedian, Eugene O'Neill, been influenced by these early writers? As indicated by material quoted from some of his letters and diaries, O'Neill himself evidently felt that the Greek drama had a strong influence on his writing; especially in his attempts to give a "transfiguring nobility to tragedy", to "interpret Life in terms of lives", and in his consciousness of the "Force" behind the universe.

And after an examination of the plays of O'Neill it would seem that he is justified in this feeling. Many of his stage techniques and devices show the Greek influence, such as: the use of masks (e.g. The Great God Brown), the use of asides and soliloquies (e.g. The Strange Interlude), and the use of the chorus to create moods and atmosphere (e.g. Mourning Becomes Electra).

Many of his settings and backgrounds indicate the Greek influence: the use of drums in The Emperor Jones gain the same effect as the "Furies" in the Oresteia; the stage sets of Mourning Becomes Electra and Lazarus Laughed are similar to the Greek stage settings; scenes from Marco Millions are also suggestive of Greek stage arrangements. The elements of Nature are used by both Sophocles and O'Neill to give effective backgrounds.

As characteristics of style we find symbolism apparent in both the Greek and O'Neill tragedy; as, for

example, the use of the sea in Anna Christie and the use of nature in Sophocles' Oedipus in Colonnus. The use of tragic irony, the interest in elements of horror, the similarities in form and structure, and the use of a peculiar kind of suspense are all characteristics of style employed by both the Greeks and O'Neill, as proven by examples and illustrations in the text of this thesis.

Often O'Neill's language, in both his lyric passages (as in The Fountain and Lazarus Laughed) and his rhetorical passages (as in The Hairy Ape and The Great God Brown) reminds one of the language in the Greek plays. In fact, there are places in Mourning Becomes Electra where one feels he is reading a modern translation of a Greek play.

In his characterization, O'Neill has shown the Greek influence in at least two ways: first, many of his characters have the nobility of the Greek characters; and, secondly, they show a similar heroic attitude in their acceptance of their fates, as, for example, Lavinia in Mourning Becomes Electra and Alcestis in Alcestis.

It is in the themes of O'Neill, however, that we find the most interesting evidences of the Greek influence. O'Neill differs from his contemporaries, for his themes are of a more universal nature and deal with timeless subjects and conflicts, as did the Greeks. In Strange Interlude, he captures the Greek spirit as he portrays life as a cycle.

In several other plays, including Anna Christie, he develops the Greek theme of the eternal conflict between Man and Fate; in Mourning Becomes Electra we find the theme of the effect of a curse upon a family, as in the Orestes' plays; in Desire Under the Elms we have the interest in incest, lust, and murder apparent in the Oedipus plays; and in Strange Interlude there is the question of the nature of the power behind the universe, the same question that the Greek dramatists asked. Thus, we see that it is possible to indicate the influence of the Greek dramatic technique upon O'Neill in his stage techniques and devices, in settings and backgrounds, in his general style of writing, in his characterizations, and in his themes.

Has Eugene O'Neill been influenced by the Greek technique of tragedy? After considering the material presented here and the fact that seventy-five per cent of his plays show some evidences of this influence, it seems safe to say that the answer is in the affirmative.

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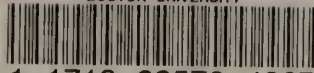
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